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BIBLIOGRAPHY

III. HISTORICAL COMPOSITION

As an introductory chapter to the *Bibliographia Catholica Americana*, projected in these pages in the initial number of the REVIEW, short papers were planned on three main divisions of historical work: namely, *Historical Research* (Historical Bibliography, Auxiliary Sciences, and Historical Method), *Historical Criticism* (Provenance, and Exegesis), and *Historical Composition*. Strictly speaking, Historical Method, which is a more general term for this series of operations, has but two parts—Analysis and Synthesis.

Langlois-Seignobos, for example, in their *Introduction to the Study of History*, have followed this system. Their volume is divided into three Books. The first Book on *Preliminary Studies* introduces the student to the methods of research for documentary material, and to the auxiliary sciences. The second Book, on the *Analytical Operations*, touches upon the following subjects:

Introduction: GENERAL CONDITIONS OF HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE.

Section I: EXTERNAL CRITICISM.—I. *Textual Criticism.* II. *Critical Investigation of Authorship.* III. *Critical Classification of Sources.* IV. *Critical Scholarship and Scholars.*

Section II: INTERNAL CRITICISM.—I. *Interpretative Criticism* (Hermeneutics). II. *Negative Internal Criticism of the Good Faith and Accuracy of Authors.* III. *Determination of Particular Facts.*

The third Book, entitled *Synthetic Operations*, contains five chapters on the following topics:

I. *General Conditions of Historical Construction.* II. *The Grouping of Facts.* III. *Constructive Reasoning.* IV. *The Construction of General Formulae.* V. *Exposition.*

The work of Historical Composition may be understood to embrace the whole of these synthetical operations, some of which make up the remote preparations for the final draft, and others of which are of proximate value for the same. The remote preparation starts where the process of analysis leaves off. All analysis properly organized begins under definite and almost rigid limitations.¹ These limitations are generally of time, place, and idea. Placing boundaries to the subject beforehand gives a reasonable restraint upon the research-work, especially on the bibliographical field, and at times a limit to the process of critical interpretation. For beginners in the scientific study of history, limitation is one of the surest safeguards. Historical research familiarizes the student with the general and special knowledge necessary for his subject. Historical criticism supplies him for his work with a mass of isolated facts, which have more or less stood the test of investigation. But the net result of these opera-

¹ "The operations of history are so numerous, from the first discovery of the document to the final formula of the conclusion, they require such minute precautions, so great a variety of natural gifts and acquired habits, that there is no man who can perform by himself all the work on any one point."—LANGLOIS-SEIGNOBOS, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

tions is not history. The facts gathered must go through a process of synthesis, before the real work of historical exposition can be started.

It is this process of synthetic operations which we call the remote preparation. The general conditions of historical composition or construction are based upon the principle that "the mode of construction cannot be regulated by the ideal plan of the science we desire to construct; it depends on the materials we have at our disposal. It would be chimerical to formulate a scheme which the materials would not allow us to carry out; it would be like proposing to construct an Eiffel Tower with building-stones."² The process of analysis, when completed, may, indeed, "leave the student of history with a body of disjointed and disconnected facts,"³ but it is too much to say as Seignobos has done, that the synthetic operations must necessarily begin with "an incoherent mass of minute facts, with detailed knowledge reduced as it were to a powder." The mind cannot help grouping the facts obtained. The limitations which the student places upon his research, gradually bring into relief in his own mind the natural grouping of time, place and idea; and the overlapping which occurs with any one of these three divisions, already starts the loom of history in motion. It is true that the page will lack the one element which makes history readable, that is, reality, unless the facts found are visioned by the student in their original setting. Imagination plays an important part in combining different elements of fact knowledge, and when all the facts at one's command are thus revived, grouping must be done, very largely again under the influence of imagination. The gaps which occur between facts or between groupings of facts call for something more serious than vision. Logic has to be applied, and historical reasoning brought into action. Little by little, classified groupings emerge with more and more distinctness, and from these groupings a species of general reasoning can be drawn which leads up to formulas or conclusions. Hence, the four stages in the process of historical construction: (1) the visioning of the facts; (2) the grouping of facts; (3) constructive reasoning; (4) the construction of general formulae.

All this, however, does not complete the process. This is what Father Fonck, S. J., in the *Travail Scientifique* (p. 141) calls the *mise en oeuvre des materiaux*. So far, the constructive process merely arranges the *materiaux* for the last stage of historical work; namely, Exposition. "A little thought," says Collins, "will show how frequently this last step is left unfinished; how many there are who seem to be able to produce materials for history but not to write history. Nor is it only a question of the possession and the utilization of a good literary style. Many who have this cannot write history, and many who have it not can yet do so; for from this point of view, as we have said already, style is nothing but the vehicle for the presentation of the work to the world after that work is in effect complete. What is really needed is that the facts should be digested and systematised until they have their right perspective and their right proportion: a perspective and proportion which will depend indeed upon the point of view,

² *Ibid.*, p. 211.

³ COLLINS, *Study of Ecclesiastical History*, p. 51. London, 1903.

but which, when this is once taken up, have a real existence. Then they must be presented in such a way as to form one whole with a unity of its own, just as the elements of a landscape combine to form one whole, or as the elements of a picture ought to combine to form one whole."⁴

Exposition can be said to demand mainly three things: a *plan*, *sincerity*, and a *power of expression*.

The materials at one's command and the purpose in view will naturally dominate the plan of the work. There must be a well-balanced proportion between the materials and the viewpoint. The viewpoint in historical writing has undergone changes, and historians have not all the same conception of the end aimed at by historical work. Hence the "mode of writing history" is not and has not been a constant one. The three main schools of historiography are the *narrative*, the *didactic*, and the *genetic*. The narrative school of historians has as its aim "to preserve the memory and propagate the knowledge of glorious deeds, or of events which were of importance to a man, a family, or a people."⁵ So much religious history is still written from this standpoint that its value has little that is permanent. This is the easiest kind of history to compose, for the chronological "mode" usually provides a cloak for large gaps in historical facts and in historical reasoning. Most Church Histories are written in the simple narrative style with an occasional skirmish into the didactic. When facts are selected because they are useful in business, in politics, in religion, or in education, or when the search is for precedents to enlighten statesmen or churchmen, for arguments to support a cause or a theory, or for ethical ideals to surprise the world, then we have the so-called didactic conception of history.⁶ Herodotus is called the founder of narrative history; Thucydides, the father of pragmatic or didactic history. "For more than two thousand years after Herodotus and Thucydides," writes Johnson, "the narrative and the didactic types of history seemed to exhaust the possibilities of historical construction. The particular forms which they assumed, the particular kinds of facts which they celebrated, the particular kinds of lessons or precedents which they sought to impress, the particular philosophies which they invoked to explain events were bewildering in their variety, but the general types persisted."⁷ In its narrative and didactic forms, history was considered more as a branch of literature than as a distinct science with its own laws and customs. A change came about the middle of the nineteenth century, when the strict methods of procedure in other sciences were applied to history. This has given rise to the science of historical research, and of historical criticism. It has also brought into being a new type of historical composition—the historical monograph with all its scientific apparatus of notes, references, and *pièces justificatives*. This third school which cannot be said to dominate history writing outside the Universities, is the genetic or development school. Its cornerstone is criticism, and it is this all-ruling fact which keeps it

⁴ *Op. cit.*, pp. 63-64.

⁵ LANGLOIS-SEIGNOBOS, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

⁶ JOHNSON, *Teaching of History*, p. 17. New York, 1916.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

from becoming popular. "Uncritical histories of the narrative and didactic types are still being produced. There are still those who demand that history shall first of all be literature. There are others, the majority of schoolmasters among them, who demand that history shall first of all be lessons in moral or patriotism, or social service. There are others, and here must be included a large part of the legion described as 'the general reading public,' who demand of history only that it shall be interesting. *To many of these the very idea of scientific history with its destructive criticism, its denial of the right of personal bias, and its sober gray of fact, amounting in many cases to a mere balancing of probabilities without definite conclusions, is somewhat repugnant.*"¹

Scientific history has called itself too often evolutionary history or history acting under the principles of evolution, and has appeared too often as if guided by some of the false standards of "Higher Criticism," for it to be given the place of honor among those who see in Church history something just as important as the accurate narration of *human* events. The ecclesiastical historian cannot hold fast to the aim which should be present in his work, if the genetic mode alone be followed. Events are to be related, it is true, with the strictest accuracy possible, and general formulae or conclusions are only to be drawn in strict conformity with the rules of logic; but beyond this comes the moral lesson for the present and the future. The mere recital of the discovery of America, the story of its colonization, its birth as a nation, its wars, and its progress, is not American history. There must be running through the pages of the book we put in the hands of our children the living fire of love for their country, of admiration for the great men of the past, of honest appreciation of the shabby side of our history, and above all the spirit of patriotic purpose in the upbuilding of their character as citizens of the land. No less and no more is asked of Church history. Honesty, sincerity, and impartiality must never be absent from the narrative. The lessons drawn from the past must never be exaggerated—*quod nimis probat, nihil probat*. But in every case the facts offered must be substantiated by sources which have stood the test of criticism. History is one of the greatest teachers of truth. It gives *great principles* by which to judge events, and in the light of these principles a triple result is bound to arise: an admiration for the Church that is full of childlike love and loyalty; and assurance of mind that is undismayed however grievous the accusations brought against the Church, even should these accusations be true; and the possession of a clue to the right understanding of problems connected with the Church in the present day. It gives also a *width of outlook and sympathy* that leads to the cultivation of the mind.²

The term: power of expression, so far as historical writing is concerned, is not synonymous with rhetoric. It is far better to present a subject with truth, clearness, and precision, unadorned by the art of rhetoric than a well-written essay filled with inaccuracies and faulty conclusions. Rhetoric is not to be despised, but if the style is exact, clear, moderate, in good taste, and elegant, and if the reader realizes that the principal thing which has guided his author is love for the

¹ JOHNSON, *op cit.*, p. 27.

² Cf. *The Teaching of Church History in Catholic Girls' Schools*, by a Religious of the Sacred Heart, pp. 10-13. Roehampton (London), 1917.

truth, the work in question is not far from perfection. James F. Rhodes, in his paper *Concerning the Writing of History*,¹⁰ lays stress on originality: "An historian, to make a mark, must show some originality somewhere in his work." The best originality in the field of historical writing, now, as ever in the past, is the originality which seeks the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but what will clarify the truth. In the long dynasty of historians from Herodotus to our own day, very few deserve the *tulit praeium* for sheer honesty.

¹⁰ *Annual Report of the American Historical Association*, Vol. i (1900), pp. 51-65.